

LARRY CROUSE



2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REVIEW



Committees:

Technology,
Telecommunications
& Energy,
Ranking Republican
Commerce & Labor

Select Committee on
Pension Policy

Olympia Office:

429 John L. O'Brien Bldg.
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
360-786-7820

Toll-free Legislative Hotline:

1-800-562-6000

TTY (Hearing-impaired Hotline):

1-800-635-9993

E-mail:

crouse_la@leg.wa.gov

Web page:

[http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/
members/crouse.htm](http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/crouse.htm)

• Representative Larry Crouse •

Dear Friends & Neighbors,

The 2004 legislative session has concluded. Legislators will reconvene in January of 2005, when our Capitol Building reopens after extensive renovations.

This last legislative session saw us take some **important steps forward in improving education, preventing crime, protecting food safety and establishing a new primary system.** It also saw some missed opportunities, including providing help for small employers and implementing true tort reform.

Most everyone preferred our popular blanket primary system, but a federal court threw it out. As a result, lawmakers were forced to go back to the drawing board. This was no-win situation. The alternative is a primary system similar to Montana's, in which candidates appear on separate primary ballots and voters choose which ballot to cast. I encourage you to visit the Secretary of State's web site for more information on this system (<http://www.secstate.wa.gov>).

Legislators also passed a supplemental budget, which is a mid-way adjustment to our state's operating budget that is written every two years. My fear is that lawmakers may be facing close to a \$1 billion deficit when they convene next year. **We must be more fiscally responsible with our operating and supplemental budgets.** Lawmakers owe this to the taxpayers of the state.

My job is to represent you, so please contact me if I can help.
As always, I welcome your feedback.

Sincerely,

Rep. Larry Crouse

REP. LARRY CROUSE • DISTRICT 4

AN IMPORTANT YEAR FOR K-12 EDUCATION

Several significant K-12 education measures passed this session. A lot of the groundwork for these bills was set in 2003, and they came to fruition in 2004. **Our students will benefit from these measures in the years to come.**



We can do no more as a state than to invest in the hopes and dreams of our children. **The foundation of good families and a vibrant economy begins with education and our schools.**

Here are some K-12 highlights from the 2004 session:

- ✓ WASL and graduation requirements were clearly defined. Students will now have multiple and different means of passing the WASL.
- ✓ The school district levy base calculation was changed. This will allow districts to keep more of the money they've raised.
- ✓ Charter schools legislation passed. This will allow for greater flexibility and more options for students and parents.
- ✓ The Learning Assistance Program was revamped. These grants will now focus more on lower income areas and less on test scores.

LESSENING THE TAX BURDEN ON FAMILIES AND SENIOR CITIZENS

The lessons we've learned from tax incentives for employers should be applied to the citizens of our state. With our economy showing signs of recovery, but still struggling in some sectors, **families need property tax relief.** With more money in their pockets, families will invest in the economy. **This stimulates growth, creates jobs and strengthens economic vitality.**

The Legislature passed a bill that is a step in the right direction and protects vulnerable citizens. This measure gives **property tax exemptions to disabled senior citizens.** This is one way of providing relief for those who need it most.

PUNISHING SEX OFFENDERS

There is no worse crime than one perpetrated against a defenseless child.

An important bill passed this session will tighten up laws involving the Special Sex Offender Sentencing Alternative program — commonly referred to as SSOSA — which offers sex offenders treatment in exchange for lighter prison sentences.

With the measure that passed, **it will now be tougher for child rapists and molesters to avoid prison time by agreeing to treatment.** Prior to this, child molesters could often go through a treatment program and receive little prison time for their crimes. **While treatment is important, so is**

punishment. Criminals need to spend time in prison as consequences for their actions.

Several legislators fought for an even stronger bill that would have required mandatory minimum sentences. I was one of these legislators. Unfortunately, a vocal few legislators stopped it from happening.

It's still important we passed what we did because it sends a stern warning to anyone who might harm children. I thank all the child advocates out there who helped get this important bill passed.

ADDRESSING "MAD COW" DISEASE

Late December 2003 brought us shocking news when the USDA diagnosed an adult Holstein cow from a farm in Mabton as having bovine spongiform encephalopathy — or "Mad Cow" disease.

The Legislature quickly reacted to this situation by passing important bills this session. **The aim of these measures was to address food safety and to assist Washington's beef industry with their economic losses:**

- ✓ One bill makes it a gross misdemeanor to transport or deliver live "downer" cows — non-ambulatory animals which are unable to walk or stand on their own — to ensure that they will not enter the beef supply.



2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REVIEW



Rep. Crouse discusses issues on the floor of the House with Reps. Brad Benson (left) and Roger Bush.

- ✓ Another measure suspends the business and occupation tax for the state's meat processing industry until foreign countries lift their embargoes and begin accepting American beef again. This is important when you consider 15 percent of Washington beef is exported to foreign countries, creating jobs in all sectors of the agriculture industry.
- ✓ A third bill prepares Washington to join a federal "cradle-to-grave" animal identification and tracking system. Still under development by the U.S. Agriculture Department, this program would utilize computer-chips inserted in animals' ears for tracking livestock across state and county lines.

SAVING OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Lawsuit abuse and exposure to liability have drastically impacted the cost and risk for doctors and other health care providers. **Medical malpractice insurance premiums have skyrocketed out of control.** As a result, doctors are having trouble maintaining and establishing services, particularly in rural areas.



Difficult times for health care providers mean especially hard times for consumers. More and more people either cannot get

health care when they need it, or are having their options limited. Something must be done next legislative session to address this crisis, and the solution begins with meaningful tort reform.

The Senate passed a comprehensive tort reform bill that would have struck at the core of the problem. It received a hearing in the House Judiciary Committee, where a lot of people showed up in support. Yet, it never was voted on in this committee and never saw the House floor.

We need real tort reform, like the plan approved by the Senate, to protect victims, ensure future access to affordable health care and provide an environment where doctors may continue to provide care to patients.

CREATING AND PRESERVING JOBS

Washington has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. Part of the problem is that we are not viewed as employer-friendly. When companies look to relocate from other states, Washington is not inviting. **The Legislature needs to continue to work on creating a business climate that fosters a growing economy.**

Here are some bills that would have helped our state's business climate prosper, but failed to pass this session. These reforms would help create jobs and should be priorities next session:

✓ WORKERS' COMPENSATION REFORM

With rates up an average of 40 percent in just two years, several proposed reforms were introduced,

REP. LARRY CROUSE • DISTRICT 4

including simplifying rate calculations, managing fraud, and getting employees back to work. Unfortunately, none of these bills passed.

✓ REGULATORY REFORM

A bill was introduced to limit state agencies' rule-making authority and place the burden of proof on the agency's shoulders, not the employers'. This measure, also, did not pass.

✓ HEALTH AND LIABILITY

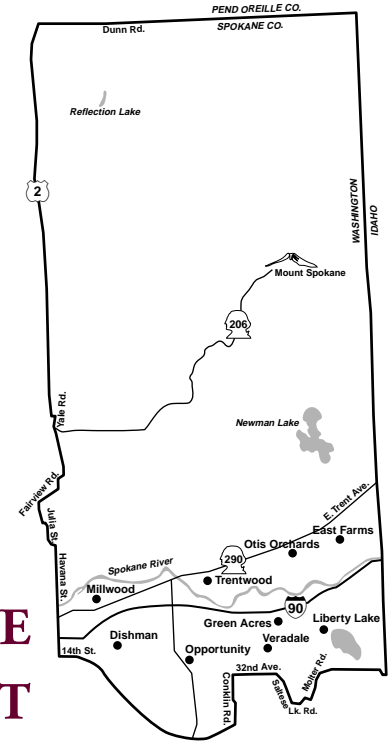
INSURANCE REFORM

Rapidly increasing health and liability insurance costs are forcing employers to cut jobs or go out of business. State requirements that tell

health insurers what services must be included in their plans have sent premium costs soaring and left working families with no options for affordable, basic healthcare.

The minority party in the House proposed reducing these costly, government-imposed mandates. They also introduced a comprehensive plan to control runaway jury awards, which would reduce liability insurance costs. Both bills died in committee.

4TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REVIEW

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Washington State
Department of Printing

REPRESENTATIVE
LARRY CROUSE
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Printed on recycled paper